

Medical Test Site Program Assessment

by Kathy LaBeau

All clinical laboratories in Washington are regulated under the Washington State Medical Test Site Program (MTS). The staff of the Office of Laboratory Quality Assurance evaluate laboratories through on-site inspections, proficiency testing monitoring and complaint investigations, in addition to providing technical assistance, consultation and training.

Each year we evaluate testing site quality and identify training needs based on our assessment activities. As of March 2000, the MTS database consisted of 2660 laboratories categorized as:

71% Certificate of Waiver or
Provider-Performed Microscopic Procedures
(PPMP)

22% Moderate or High Complexity Testing

7% Accredited by a Private Organization

In 1999, 340 laboratories had on-site visits (including routine inspections, technical assistance visits, and complaint investigations) and 35% of these sites had one or more deficiencies cited. This rate is consistent with what we have found in the past few years; in 1997, 34% of laboratories surveyed had deficiencies; in 1998, 33% had deficiencies.

Inside This Issue

- 2 Glycated Hemoglobin Test Methods Revisited
- 3 MTS Program Assessment, Continued
Glycohemoglobin Resource Directory
- 4 Laboratory Personnel Shortage Update
- 5 7th Annual Clinical Laboratory Conference
- 6 MTS License Renewal / Calendar of Events

The deficiencies we found in 1999 were categorized as follows (with common examples):

- 40% Quality Assurance
 - Lack of a comprehensive plan or policies
 - Mechanisms not in place or not carried out
- 23% Record Keeping
 - Insufficient documentation of quality control and quality assurance activities, equipment function checks
 - Problems with patient reports, corrected reports
- 19% Quality Control
 - Insufficient quality control activities
 - Inadequate procedures and policies
- 12% Personnel
 - Director responsibilities, supervision
- 6% Proficiency Testing
 - Lack of enrollment
 - Poor follow-up on problems

Twenty-four percent of the laboratories with deficiencies had five or more deficiencies cited. We find that undergoing an initial inspection or having changes in personnel or poorly trained personnel are all predictors for higher numbers of deficiencies being cited.

When we compared laboratories that had on-site inspections in 1997 and 1999, we found that most (67%) remained in compliance (had no deficiencies cited either

continued on page 3

Glycated Hemoglobin Test Methods Revisited

by Miriam Marcus-Smith, Foundation for Health Care Quality

The March issue of *Elaborations* was devoted to the importance of glycated hemoglobin test methods in the management of diabetes. To summarize briefly, studies in Washington showed that the wide variation in methods, results, and reference ranges associated with glycated hemoglobin created an inability to determine how effectively people with diabetes are managing their disease. Based on those findings, the Department of Health and the Foundation for Health Care Quality initiated the Standardized Laboratory Practices Project (SLPP) to focus on this opportunity for improving diabetes care. The SLPP's Steering Committee has been working with laboratories, physicians, and manufacturers to increase the choice of standardized test methods for glycated hemoglobin. Information regarding the importance of using these methods has been distributed to the laboratory and provider communities over the last several months in meetings and via a number of publications.

At this time I would like to provide you with an update of the use of glycated hemoglobin test methods. First, most of the instruments and methods available in Washington are certified by the National Glycohemoglobin Standard-

ization Program (NGSP), including those approved for use in waived labs (the Bayer DCA 2000 and DCA 2000 Plus). At least 80% of the glycated hemoglobin tests conducted in licensed laboratories are performed using a certified method. This figure reflects both choice of method by laboratories and decisions at the manufacturers' level to seek and maintain NGSP certification. This number will continue to increase as the non-certified methods are phased out by manufacturers.

However, there are still some laboratories in Washington that continue to use non-certified methods. The SLPP Steering Committee encourages laboratories to change to certified methods when planning for equipment updates. The list of certified methods is updated quarterly (most recently as of June 1) and is available at the NGSP website (see the Resource Directory on page 3).

The National Committee on Quality Assurance (NCQA) is once again considering a requirement that managed care plans use only NGSP-certified methods in reporting certain elements in the Health Plan Employer Data and Information Set (HEDIS) in 2002. If implemented, health plans may choose to consider this criterion in their contracts with laboratories.

Although most of the formal activities of the SLPP will have been concluded by the end of the summer, the Department of Health will continue to monitor which methods are in use. The Medical Test Site license renewal forms mailed in July include additional questions designed to allow this quality improvement effort to continue.

Because there remains a need to increase the use of standardized methods, the SLPP's Steering Committee encourages you to consider the following actions:

- Visit the NGSP web site and/or contact NGSP staff directly for more information about the certification processes and criteria and the current status of your method. As noted above, methods can move on and off the list.
- If you are using a non-certified method, contact your manufacturer's representative to discuss their plans for achieving certification or rationale for not seeking it.
- If your facility is in the process of changing instruments, consider the purchase of currently-certified instruments and discuss with NGSP staff their experience with your choice (e.g., tenure on the certified list, issues with quality and availability of reagents, etc.).

See Page 3 for how to obtain additional information.

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MTS Program Assessment continued from page 1

year) or improved (had deficiencies cited in 1997 but none in 1999). Of the 33% that had deficiencies both years, or none in 1997 but deficiencies in 1999, we again found that changes in personnel, poorly trained personnel and insufficient numbers of personnel were common findings.

In 1999, we found that consecutive proficiency testing errors remained low. Only 5% of laboratories performing proficiency testing had a failure on two consecutive or two of three proficiency testing events and less than 1% of laboratories had consecutive failures on three events. This demonstrates the capacity of laboratories to learn from their errors and make appropriate corrections.

Overall, we believe these findings show the need for continued technical assistance and other training opportunities for the laboratories that we regulate.

The Office of Laboratory Quality Assurance currently has the following educational materials available (upon request or online):

- Description of the On-site Survey Process
- Medical Test Site Checklist (All Specialties)
- Pre-inspection Self-assessment Checklists (Test Specific)
 - Aerobic cultures
 - Gram stains
 - Moderate complexity testing kits
 - Microscopic examinations
 - Testing in dermatology practices
 - Moderate complexity chemistry testing
 - Moderate complexity hematology testing
- Developing a Quality Assurance Plan
- Proficiency Testing or Biannual Verification of Accuracy
- Suggestions for Biannual Verification of Accuracy
- Personnel Qualifications and Responsibilities

We updated and revised the MTS WAC to be more user friendly and useful to the laboratories we regulate. In addition, we continue to provide training classes on pertinent laboratory topics, in conjunction with the Department of Health Public Health Laboratories training program. We welcome your input on topics for classes and educational materials.

To request any of our educational materials, please call (206) 361-2802 or go to our homepage at www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/fsl/LQA_home.htm.

Glycohemoglobin Resource Directory

For More Information on Standardization of Glycated Hemoglobin

- NSGP web site: <http://web.missouri.edu/~diabetes/ngsp.html>
- Proficiency testing data: check your proficiency testing Participant Summary for Glycohemoglobin Surveys for additional information comparing test methods.

For More Information about the Standardized Laboratory Practices Project

- Miriam Marcus-Smith, Project Director, at the Foundation for Health Care Quality, (206) 682-2811 ext. 20, or mmsmith@coap.org.

Laboratory Personnel Shortage Update

by Leonard Kargacin

The June issue of ELABORATIONS included an overview of the activities of the workgroup. Since that issue was published, the workgroup held another meeting. This article provides an update of the Workgroup's activities.

The workgroup is made up of the directors of the various clinical laboratory training programs in Washington, the presidents of the Washington State chapters of the laboratory professional organizations, and representatives from the Advisory Council. In addition to the workgroup members, the following people attended the meeting: Kelly Shaw, Program Manager for the Department of Health (DOH) Office of Community and Rural Health Recruitment and Retention Program; Jodi Palmer, Assistant Director of the Western Washington Area Health Education Center (AHEC), and Troy Hutson from the Washington State Hospital Association (WSHA). Kelly and Jodi provided summaries of their programs which provide recruitment and retention assistance for primary care providers for rural communities or under-served areas. Troy updated the workgroup on the activities of the WSHA Task Force on health care personnel shortage issues. The clinical laboratory will be delineated in the Task Force Report as one of the eight health professions experiencing shortages. This inclusion is due to the activities of the CLAC Personnel Shortage Workgroup.

Members of the workgroup have been interviewed by the Puget Sound Business Journal and CAP Today for articles being written on personnel shortages in the health care industry. Information will be provided in a later issue of ELABORATIONS regarding the publication dates of these articles.

Action plans adopted at the meeting include:

- High school counselors and science teachers will receive a targeted mailing in August and September which will include an information piece about the clinical laboratory professions and a questionnaire to assess their knowledge of the clinical laboratory professions.
- High school counselors and science teachers in the Tacoma area will be invited to attend an educational session that will be held in conjunction with the Northwest Medical Laboratory Symposium.
- Current recruitment materials are being evaluated by the workgroup.

- The establishment of a website for the clinical laboratory professions is being studied. The intent is to have a central location for recruitment materials, information about the training programs in Washington, and links to other websites of interest.
- A statewide laboratory salary survey was suggested so that the educational programs have current salary range information for their students.
- An article is being written for the professional society newsletters to provide information to laboratories about the requirements for becoming a training site for one of the educational programs. The goal is to encourage more facilities to participate as training sites.
- Program capacity can be increased in the various education programs if there are more student applicants and more available training sites.
- The next meeting will be held in conjunction with the Medical Technology Educators of the Northwest meeting in October.

Websites of interest that were discussed at the meeting include:

miracleworker.com - national site for job listings in Washington and across the rest of the country

labexplorer.com - contains a tremendous amount of laboratory resource information

salary.com - information about national salary ranges for various professions

www.Pbs.org/als/rte/windows/health.htm - PBS learning site

monsterboard.com - job bulletin board

careermosaic.com - job bulletin board

ELABORATIONS
Can Now Be
Found on the
Internet

http://www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/fsl/LQA_Home.htm

7th Annual Clinical Laboratory Conference

by Leonard Kargacin

The 7th Annual Clinical Laboratory Conference will be held on November 13, 2000, at the Seattle Marriott Sea-Tac Hotel located near Sea-Tac International Airport. This is an excellent opportunity to hear about the current status of health care from a variety of experts.

Dennis Weissman, president and publisher of Washington G-2 Reports in Washington, D.C., will present the keynote address for the Conference. Those who have heard Dennis speak in the past know that his presentations are very dynamic and thought provoking. Since this is a major election year, Dennis will be able to provide a post-election analysis of what we can "look forward to" with the new administration and from the next congressional session.

Mark Johnston, president and CEO of LabPortal.com, will present a session entitled "Looking Into The Crystal Ball: The Future Of Information Technology In The Laboratory Industry". This promises to be a very dynamic session and will include discussion of issues facing laboratory managers, the internet revolution, web-based connectivity and the ASP model, product architecture, product functionality.

Mary Briden, Professor and Chair of the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences and Dean of Instruction at Phoenix College in Phoenix, Arizona, will present a session on personnel shortages in the clinical laboratory profession. This will be a session that everyone working in the clinical laboratory should attend. Items that will be discussed in this session will include the current crisis in finding trained laboratory professionals; how did we get here; what is being done to alleviate the shortage on a national, regional, and state basis; what coping strategies are facilities using; and, most importantly, what does the future hold in regard to laboratory staffing. In addition, members of the Clinical Laboratory Personnel Shortage Workgroup will give an overview of their activities on a state level.

A Question and Answer (Q & A) session will round out the day with all speakers being available to address your specific questions and concerns. This portion of the program has been very valuable to all participants. Start writing down your questions!

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Laboratory Directors
Laboratory / Office Managers
Department Supervisors
Bench Personnel
Billing Personnel
Compliance Officer

The conference offers something pertinent for everyone whether you work in a physician office laboratory, an independent laboratory, or a small or large hospital.

LOCATION

The Conference this year will be held at the Seattle Marriott Hotel Sea-Tac which has easy access from Interstate 5 and the Sea-Tac International Airport. Conference programs and registration information will be mailed in mid-September. If you do not receive your Conference Registration Flyer or have questions, contact information is found on page 2. The registration fee includes a continental breakfast, breaks, and lunch. **MAKE YOUR PLANS TO ATTEND TODAY!!**

New Training Classes for 2001?

by Shelley Lankford, Training Coordinator

I am currently planning the laboratory training course schedule for the year 2001. I would like to receive suggestions from the laboratory community for any new courses you would like to see offered by the DOH Public Health Laboratory's Training Program. I will be offering basic courses in parasitology, blood cell morphology, urine sediments, and wet mount examinations on a yearly basis as well as adding regulation updates as needed. If there are any past courses you would like to see presented again, please include them with your correspondence.

I would prefer written submission of your suggestions via mail or email. I can also be reached by phone if you do not have time to write a response. Please send any suggestions to Shelley Lankford, Training Coordinator at the Washington State Department of Health, Public Health Laboratories, 1610 NE 150th Street, Shoreline, WA 98155-7224. My email address is Shelley.Lankford@doh.wa.gov and my phone number is (206)361-2810. Thank you for your assistance with this project.

MTS License Renewal

Medical Test Site (MTS) licenses expire on October 31, 2000. Renewal applications were mailed to all currently licensed facilities around the 15th of July. The applications are due back to the Office of Laboratory Quality Assurance (LQA) by August 15, 2000. Once your application is returned to LQA and processed, a license fee statement will be sent to your facility. With over 2700 license applications to process, we need your timely cooperation in this process to assure that all facilities are re-licensed on time. The MTS rules require licensees to submit a completed renewal application form and fee thirty days prior to the expiration date of the license. This means that all applications and fees must be received in our office by **October 1, 2000**.

If you have any questions, or if you have not received your application packet, please call our office at (206) 361-2802. The envelope containing the license renewal packet was addressed to the person listed as the laboratory contact in our database, and had "license renewal" stamped on the front.

Calendar of Events

PHL Training Classes:

Wet Mounts	
September 27	Shorline
Techniques in Venipuncture	
October 12	Shoreline
Basic STD Skills	
October 13	Shoreline

Northwest Medical Laboratory Symposium

October 18 - 21 Tacoma

7th Annual Clinical Laboratory Conference

November 13 Seattle

Contact information for the events listed above can be found on page 2. The Calendar of Events is a list of upcoming conferences, deadlines, and other dates of interest to the clinical laboratory community. If you have events that you would like to have included, please mail them to ELABORATIONS at the address on page 2. Information must be received at least one month before the scheduled event. The editor reserves the right to make final decisions on inclusion.

ELABORATIONS

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